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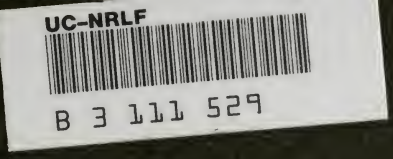

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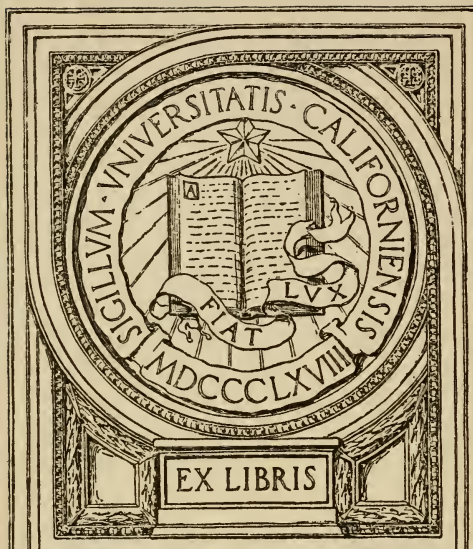
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Why India is Heart and Soul with Great Britain

BY

BHUPENDRANATH BASU

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WHY INDIA IS HEART AND SOUL WITH GREAT BRITAIN

Why is India heart and soul with Great Britain in the present crisis? The answer is quite plain to the Indian, but probably it will not be so plain to the Englishman who has never been in India, or having been has not come in touch with the heart and soul of India. Alas! all Englishmen, even in India, do not try to do so. If India was conquered territory in the sense that is usually understood, or if the Indians held the position of a subject nation, the response given by India in the hour of the Empire's need would have been a matter for wonder indeed; but India is not a conquered country, nor are her people a subject population.

British Rule in India.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, the central Moghul authority at Delhi had fallen into complete and irretrievable decay. The Mahratta power which had arisen on its ruins received a stunning blow in the third battle of Panipat. India was divided into a number of small States, held apart by mutual suspicion and jealousy, and not seldom warring against each other. The country had become a prey to anarchy and confusion. In this state of things, the help of the French or the English trading companies was sought by rival States or harassed populations.

The battle of Plassey, which laid the foundations of British rule in India and gave to the East India Company the revenue administration of Bengal, was undertaken as much on the invitation of the Indian people as of the threatened English settlement at Murshidabad, and fought practically with Indian soldiers. In the wars that followed, the Government of Great Britain did not supply a single soldier or spend a single rupee. It was solely with India's money, and mostly with Indian blood, that the British Empire in India was built up and consolidated, and when the Mutiny came in 1857, and British rule in India was nearly shattered, it was again with the help of the Indian princes and people that it was re-established. Professor Seeley has justly observed that "the expression 'conquest' as applied to the acquisition of sovereignty by the East India Company in India is not merely loose but thoroughly misleading." India has never felt that she was a conquered country, and the Indians do not feel that they are a conquered people.

The Character of British Rule.

But it is not a question of historical deduction or personal feeling. The Charter Act of 1833, one of the early parliamentary statutes dealing with the government of India, "definitely and finally recognised the equality of status, of rights, and of duties of the Indian subjects of his Majesty with the British subjects." But this is not all.

India's Magna Charta.

The people of India justly attach very great importance to the Proclamation issued in 1858 by Queen

Victoria to the princes, chiefs, and people of India on the occasion of the transfer of the government of India from the East India Company to the British Crown. India was just then emerging from a bloody and terrible struggle. Great as was the occasion, marking a new and important epoch in the history of India, it was rendered doubly memorable by the great Proclamation of Queen Victoria, which has been truly called the Magna Charta of the Indian people.

High statesmanship, bringing the solace of peace to a bleeding people and holding out hopes of a great future, combined with sentiments as lofty as have ever moved humanity, was the predominant feature of this noble message, and it ended with a humble and solemn prayer which went straight into the hearts of an oriental people instinct with the religious spirit.

After announcing a general amnesty, the Proclamation proceeded :—

> "We desire no extension of Our territorial possessions ; and while We will permit no aggression upon Our dominions or Our rights, We shall sanction no encroachment on those of others. We shall respect the rights, dignity, and honour of Our Native Princes as Our own.
>
> "We hold Ourselves bound to the natives of Our Indian territories by the same obligations of duty which bind Us to all Our other subjects : and those obligations, by the blessing of Almighty God, We shall faithfully and conscientiously fulfil. It is Our earnest desire to stimulate the peaceful industry of India, to promote works of public utility and improvement, and to administer its government for

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the benefit of all Our subjects resident therein: In their prosperity will be Our strength; in their contentment Our security; and in their gratitude Our best reward. And may the God of all power grant to Us and those in authority under Us strength to carry out these Our wishes for the good of Our people."

This was not a charter of rights wrung from an unwilling Ruler by force or compulsion, but a deliberate declaration of the policy of the British Parliament graciously and aptly conveyed through the lips of a female Sovereign: and it is not a policy which the British nation has repented. On the fiftieth anniversary of the great Proclamation, it was confirmed and ratified by another message from King Edward VII. to the princes, chiefs, and people of India.

The Spirit in India.

However short the actual administration in India may have fallen of this great ideal, the Indian people have always regarded it as the fundamental principle of British rule in India. To them and to their Sovereign it has not been a mere scrap of paper. No attempt has since been made, as was done during the administrations of Wellesley and Dalhousie, to disturb Indian princes in their possessions, and though the princes have sometimes fretted under the interference of an over-meddling British official, they have always found a generous and sympathetic friend and adviser in Viceroys like Lord Minto and Lord Hardinge. And so far as the people are concerned, there has been on the whole fair progress: education, railways, irrigation, a greatly improved administration of

law, a common language as the medium of interchange of thoughts and ideas, a growing spirit of nationality, a common government and common ideals, internal peace and freedom from external aggression, have marked the history of British rule in India during the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, the reforms associated with the names of the late Earl of Minto and Viscount Morley, though somewhat mutilated in actual operation, and the sympathetic attitude of Lord Hardinge identifying the Government of India with the Indian people on the great question affecting their status as citizens of the British Empire, have drawn the nations, British and Indian, closer together.

Visit of the King.

There is in India a spirit of frank recognition of the benefits of British rule and of its immense potentialities for good, if carried on under the lead of the British democracy and freed from the trammels of constant tutelage, which certain Anglo-Indian administrators would like to impose upon it. Several generations in India were born and lived during the reign of Queen Victoria. To her, as their great Queen and Mother, from whom emanated the great charter of their rights and liberties, the Indian people were passionately attached and devoted. This feeling of personal attachment and devotion has been greatly stimulated and strengthened by the visits to India of members of the Royal Family. They know how to say and to do the right thing at the right moment, and by their inbred courtesy and geniality of manner they have helped to soften the atmosphere of aloofness with which some British officials, under

an erroneous sense of dignity and prestige, at times surround themselves.

The visit of the King and Queen, as the visible embodiment of sovereignty, and the generous and noble utterances of the King in his various addresses in India, did much to hearten the people in their faith in the ultimate fulfilment of the great Proclamation of Queen Victoria, for hopes long deferred had made them falter. The Indian people justly demand a great extension of education among the masses, for it is the foundation of all progress, and the words of the King in his reply to the address of the University of Calcutta have been taken by them as a fresh landmark in the development of education in India. His Majesty said: "It is my wish that there may be spread over the land a network of schools and colleges, from which will go forth loyal and manly and useful citizens, able to hold their own in the industries and agriculture and all the vocations in life. And it is my wish, too, that the homes of my Indian subjects may be brightened and their labour sweetened by the spread of knowledge with all that follows in its train, a higher level of thought, of comfort, and of health. It is through education that my wish will be fulfilled, and the cause of education in India will ever be close to my heart."

The Attitude of the People in this Great Crisis.

These are precious words to the Indian people as the declaration by the Sovereign of a policy which must be carried out. Great and far-reaching as have been the benefits of British rule in India, it has not yet risen to the full height of the British people in whose name and on whose behalf it is administered, nor of

the people, heirs to an ancient civilisation, for whose benefit the great Queen asked Divine help to administer her rule. Important questions, such as the right to carry arms, to enlist as volunteers, to enter the commissioned ranks of the Army, the recognition of equal citizenship in British colonies, the better administration of justice, a more equitable participation in the government of the country, still await solution, and India has necessarily felt at times sore and heart-sick; but there never has been any desire to break away. India has definitely set herself to forge ahead, and to this end to work in India as well as in England by every constitutional means in her power. With sympathetic statesmen like the Marquis of Crewe and Lord Hardinge at the head of affairs, her career may not be very difficult. Some people may have imagined, the Germans amongst others, that the difficult questions of Indian administration would keep England and India apart: and others who realised that the pace of British rule in India has been too slow, too much weighted with caution, have doubted. This feeling of doubt has been, to some extent, accentuated by the too great prominence that a section of the English Press has given to political crimes in India, forgetting that they are attributable to an infinitesimal fraction of its population. But India has never doubted. Her heart has been wholly with British rule; the foundations of her faith and loyalty have been too well and firmly laid to be lightly disturbed: all that she desires is that British rule in India should be compatible with the self-respect of her people, growing in education, knowledge, and experience; that it should develop into a rule by the people as part of the British

Empire, as was foreseen and foretold by the great statesmen who moulded her destinies in the early part of the nineteenth century. And India has been working towards this goal: she realises it must be a slow and laborious process.

Then came this great European war, sudden and swift: all doubt, all hesitation, all questions were swept away; there was but one feeling—to stand by England in the hour of danger. The great opportunity for India, in the highest sense, had come: she claimed to hold an equal position with other parts of the Empire—she wanted to prove her title. The Indian princes are eager to show that they are in fact, as they have been in name, pillars of the Empire; their ancestors had fought as captains and leaders in the army of the Great Moghul, and they are anxious to occupy their old position in the Army of Great Britain. And the people of India, who have so thoroughly identified themselves with the British people, have come forward, more generously than ever in the past, either in the days of the Hindu or the Moslem, for they had not then realised their power, to offer their services and their resources. They have through their representatives in council voted out of the revenues of India the whole cost of the Indian expeditionary force; and they are prepared to lay down their lives on the field, so that the old order of things may pass away and a new order be ushered in, based on mutual understanding and confidence and heralding an era brighter and happier than any in the past—the East and the West, India and England, marching onwards in comradeship, united in bonds forged on the field of battle and tempered in their common blood.

BHUPENDRANATH BASU.

Sept. 30, 1914.

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